



## High School Graduation Requirements Frequently Asked Questions

### **GENERAL INFORMATION & IMPLEMENTATION**

#### **Q1: Why was there a proposal to change high school graduation requirements?**

**A1:** The most recent version of graduation requirements was passed in 2009. A lot can change in 10 years, including the needs of students, schools, employers and communities. The new graduation requirements are aimed at better supporting schools to meet their students' diverse interests. Recognizing that success looks different for each student, the proposed changes give schools more flexibility to assist students in meeting their individual academic and career goals for post-high school. Along with that, the new graduation requirements allow more occasions for students to explore postsecondary opportunities and work-based learning experiences *while they are still in high school*.

#### **Q2: In general, how are the new graduation requirements different from the graduation requirements passed in 2009?**

**A2:** Rather than prescriptively laying out course requirements within subject areas, students must earn a required number of credits per subject area, with flexibility as to which courses they take, depending on their academic and career interests. For example, students must earn four total units of language arts, including one unit of writing and a half unit of speech. The remaining two and a half units are up to the student to fill in. For a student interested in journalism, a journalism class could count towards the language arts requirement and would meet the student's career interests.

Within this framework, students may earn endorsements: Advanced, Advanced Career and Advanced Honors. These endorsements are stackable and signal that the student has a specific preparation, in addition to meeting the base high school diploma requirements.

#### **Q3: Does this proposal relax the rigor of the current graduation requirements?**

**A3:** Flexibility is not equivalent to lowering standards. The base high school diploma requirements outlined in the new graduation requirements strip away some of the previous course dictates. In doing so, the state is challenging each district and community to provide distinct paths that encourage both student engagement and academic rigor. Districts may add requirements to the base they deem necessary to prepare students for the world beyond K-12. Through the new graduation requirements, the state defines the minimum and provides for some specific preparation through the ability to earn endorsements. From there, districts work with students to pursue pathways of interest designed to meet the student's individual academic and career goals.

#### **Q4: Can English Learner students be excused from taking required units of credit?**

**A4:** No. Students that have been identified as an English Learner (EL) and have an active Language Acquisition Plan are held to the same expectations as all students in meeting the base high school diploma requirements. In addition, EL students who choose to pursue advanced endorsements must be held to the same expectations as all students in meeting the requirements of those advanced endorsements.

Students that are transferring in to a district, in particular First Year in Country students, at an age that would not allow them the time to graduate, can utilize Administrative Rule 24:43:11:01 to determine the best course of action. It is a recommendation of the South Dakota Department of Education that the local school district assist the EL student in determining which classes will provide them with the greatest accessibility to skills that they would need in the workforce.

**Q6: How do graduation requirements impact students on an IEP (Individual Education Plan)?**

**A6:** Students with disabilities should strive to meet the same course requirements as all students. The IEP team has the authority to modify the specific credits required for graduation. The IEP team must take into consideration the student's postsecondary goals along with the nature of the student's disability, which prevents the student from accessing the same curriculum with accommodations and supports. See Guidance Policy: Applying Graduation Requirements to Students with Disabilities at [http://doe.sd.gov/oess/documents/sped\\_transition\\_GraduationQA.pdf](http://doe.sd.gov/oess/documents/sped_transition_GraduationQA.pdf).

If the IEP team modifies the course requirements for the student in order to receive a high school diploma, it will need to be tracked in the IEP and be reflected on the transcript. Modified courses are coded with a separate code in Infinite Campus for tracking purposes.

**Q7: How should schools address course codes for students on an IEP if there are modifications made to a course?**

**A7:** The course code that should be used for special education students should be the code that best aligns to the expectations/standards/course description that the student will be expected to meet.

For example, if they are enrolled in Algebra I (02052) and the student receives accommodations or other supports, but is still expected to meet the Algebra I standards, then the Algebra I course code (02052) should be used. However, if the Algebra I course (02052) has been modified based on the student's IEP to the extent that the expectations are not aligned to the Algebra I standards, but rather basic math concepts, then the district needs to find a code that best aligns to the expectations. In this example, a possible code could be the General Mathematics code (02002).

**Q8: With the increased flexibility of the proposed graduation requirements for school districts, which courses do schools have to offer every two years? (ARSD 24:43:11:07)**

**A8:** No changes were made to the course offerings required by ARSD 24:43:11:07. All public and state-accredited schools must offer all courses and opportunities to meet the base high school diploma requirements and all three advanced endorsements at least every two years.

**Q9: How will the new graduation requirements impact private, tribal and Bureau of Indian Education schools?**

**A9:** All state-accredited schools, including private, tribal and BIE schools must offer the coursework outlined in the base high school diploma requirements and the course offerings outlined in ARSD 24:43:11:07.

**Q10: Is "double dipping" allowed to meet graduation requirements?**

**A10:** No. For example, Economics cannot meet both the Social Studies elective requirement and the Personal Finance or Economics requirement. It can only be counted for one of the content areas.

**Q11: When will the new graduation requirements be implemented?**

**A11:** The new requirements take effect in the fall of 2018, with a so-called “soft implementation.” This means *all* students, grades 9-12, have the ability to follow the new requirements immediately, if it made sense in light of their academic and career goals. Students who were on track to graduate with the current graduation requirements are still be on track to graduate using the new requirements.

As this will be a soft implementation, schools may offer the new requirements to students right away or use the current 2009 graduation requirements. Schools may also choose to utilize the new requirements and 2009 graduation requirements simultaneously. By fall of 2020, advanced endorsements earned must be noted on the student transcripts.

## **BASE HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA REQUIREMENTS**

**Q1: Is a school district allowed to set requirements of credit beyond the 22-credit minimum?**

**A1:** Yes. Local school boards or governing bodies may set requirements of credit beyond the minimum of 22. (ARSD 24:43:11:01)

**Q2: Will school districts be allowed to add their own course requirements for high school graduation beyond the base minimum?**

**A2:** Yes. For example, within Social Studies, the new graduation requirements require three total units, including one unit of U.S. History and a half unit of U.S. Government. A school may choose to require students to earn a half unit of World History and a half unit of Geography, in addition to the requirements outlined in the base high school diploma.

**Q3: Will schools be allowed to create and offer new advanced endorsements?**

**A3:** Yes. Schools may create their own additional advanced endorsements as long as they are above the high school diploma requirements. This is a local decision.

**Q4: Does physical science count as a lab science?**

**A4:** Yes, as long as the course meets the definition of a laboratory science outlined in ARSD 24:43:01:01, which states that a laboratory class is: “a course providing opportunities for students to interact directly with the material world, or with data drawn from the material world, using tools that are not found in a library, media center, study hall, or classroom, and in which students use safe and appropriate laboratory techniques, as well as implement data collection techniques, models, and theories of science.” It is up to the district to determine whether the course meets this definition.

**Q5: Which courses will be eligible for the “state-approved advanced computer science course” that may be substituted for one unit of science (not including Biology) in some cases?**

**A5:** A list of state-approved advanced computer science courses is posted on the Graduation Requirements (2018) web page (<http://doe.sd.gov/gradrequirements/>).

**Q6: Can students meet math graduation requirements by earning courses below Algebra I?**

**A6:** Yes. For example, a student could count Pre-Algebra, Algebra I and Consumer Math as a sequence of math courses that meet the high school diploma requirements.

## **ADVANCED ENDORSEMENTS**

### **Q1: What are advanced endorsements?**

**A1:** Advanced Endorsements denote a particular area of emphasis that a student has pursued in meeting the high school graduation requirements. While all students must meet the base high school diploma requirements, students *may* earn advanced endorsements. Students are not required to earn advanced endorsements in order to receive a high school diploma, but an advanced endorsement shows the additional emphasis a student has put forth in a particular area. A student may earn one or more advanced endorsement. The advanced endorsements are: Advanced, Advanced Career and Advanced Honors.

### **Q2: What do the different advanced endorsements prepare students for?**

**A2:** In short, the advanced endorsements prepare students for the following:

- The Advanced endorsement indicates that a student has met the coursework required for entrance into South Dakota's Board of Regents institutions.
- The Advanced Career endorsement signals that a student has career experience in a concentrated area, based on academic or workplace experience and a related credential.
- The Advanced Honors endorsement indicates that a student has pursued the coursework required for students to receive the South Dakota Opportunity Scholarship.

### **Q3: Where does an advanced endorsement need to be documented?**

**A3:** The advanced endorsement must be reflected on a student's transcript. It is a local decision as to whether the advanced endorsement appears on the student's diploma.

### **Q4: When does a student need to declare an advanced endorsement(s) of interest?**

**A4:** This is a local decision. However, the department encourages districts to work with students to declare an advanced endorsement(s) before the student enters 11<sup>th</sup> grade.

### **Q5: Can a state-approved advanced computer science course be counted in lieu of a science course for advanced endorsements?**

**A5:** Students may not substitute an advanced computer science course to meet the science requirements in either the Advanced or the Advanced Honors endorsements. Students may apply the substitution in meeting the science requirements for the Advanced Career endorsement.

## **ADVANCED CAREER ENDORSEMENT**

### **Q1: What courses count towards "approved CTE units from the same career cluster" with this advanced endorsement?**

**A1:** Career and technical education (CTE) courses that are part of a *state-approved CTE program* count towards this requirement. Courses that are not part of a state-approved CTE program do not count towards CTE credit. To earn this advanced endorsement, a student may earn CTE credit from any approved program; he or she is not restricted to only approved programs at his or her home high school.

**Q2: What is the difference between two units of CTE from the same career cluster (in the Advanced Career endorsement) vs. a student being classified as a CTE concentrator for Perkins and federal reporting?**

**A2:** Only foundational, cluster and pathway courses can count for the CTE courses from the same career cluster required for the Advanced Career endorsement; whereas a CTE concentrator may use academic and/or capstone experience courses to meet the two-credit concentrator status threshold. For more information on CTE concentrator and Perkins, contact your [regional CTE specialist](#).

**Q3: Can middle school CTE courses count towards the Advanced Career endorsement?**

**A3:** No. Only high school level CTE courses may count towards the Advanced Career endorsement, as the advanced endorsement is aimed at showing the rigor a student has undergone with career preparation.

**Q4: How do we work with students who transfer into our district that have earned two units of CTE courses?**

**A4:** As long as the courses are part of the previous school's state-approved CTE program (marked on the transcript with 'CTE' in front of the course title), the courses may transfer in to meet the Advanced Career endorsement requirement.

**Q5: How does a student meet the requirement for "2 units of either of the following or a combination of the two" (listed towards the bottom of the Advanced Career endorsement)?**

**A5:** To meet this requirement, students can pursue just CTE courses or just capstone experiences, or they could mix the two. Examples:

- A student could earn two CTE units from the same career cluster (approved programs only).
- A student could earn two units of capstone experience.
- A student could earn one CTE unit (approved programs only) and one unit of capstone experience.

With any of the three options, the student also must earn an industry-recognized credential OR earn a Silver or higher on the National Career Readiness Certificate.

**Q6: What are industry-recognized credentials?**

**A6:** Industry-recognized credentials show mastery in a specific topic tied to industry. A list of industry-recognized credentials is posted on the Graduation Requirements (2018) web page (<http://doe.sd.gov/gradrequirements/>). If a school would like to offer an industry-recognized credential not on the list, a CTE content specialist advisory committee may review the proposed credential to determine whether it is appropriate for usage.

Information on the National Career Readiness Certificate can be found at:

<http://doe.sd.gov/Accountability/documents/NCRC-Policy.pdf>.

**Q7: Can schools use Perkins funds to pay for industry-recognized credentials?**

**A7:** For approved CTE programs, the following guidelines show the conditions in which Perkins funds may or may not be used to pay for industry-recognized credentials.

Perkins Funds <b>may</b> be used	Perkins Funds <b>may not</b> be used
If the certification is required for all students enrolled in a CTE course that is part of an approved CTE program	If the certification is optional in a CTE course
If the certification is used as a CTE course assessment for all students enrolled in the course and must be part of an approved CTE program	If the district paid for the certification in the prior year using state or local funds

Attainment of the industry certification must be reported in the Perkins Data Collection System.

**CAPSTONE AND WORK-BASED LEARNING**

**Q1: What qualifies as a capstone experience?**

**A1:** The following courses are considered capstone experiences: Service Learning, Entrepreneurship Experience, Senior Experience, Youth Internship, and Youth Apprenticeship (implementation occurring in SY 2019-20). More information on Capstone Experience courses can be found at: <http://doe.sd.gov/cte/capstone.aspx>.

**Q2: Can students earn core content credit for work-based learning experiences?**

**A2:** Not at this time. The state is developing a framework to potentially allow students in an approved work-based learning experience to earn core content credit. The Department of Education plans to pilot the framework over the next couple years. Additional information will be available in the future.

**TRANSCRIPTS**

**Q1: Do advanced endorsements have to be reflected on a student's transcript?**

**A1:** Transcripts must note which advanced endorsement(s) the student completed and show evidence of meeting advanced endorsement requirements. Districts are not required to note that the student met the base diploma requirements separate from noting that the student graduated. Transcripts reflecting graduation, but without an advanced endorsement, will be assumed to have met the base diploma requirements only.

Public and state-accredited school districts will be required to denote advanced endorsements on student transcripts starting in the fall of 2020. The state is working to make appropriate changes within the student information management system.

**Q2: How will outside entities validate a student's transcript?**

**A2:** The Department of Education requires that public districts use the state-adopted common course number on a student's transcript. The common course numbers are used to validate completed coursework for the South Dakota Opportunity Scholarship. The state common course numbers are also used for accountability purposes including, but not limited to: Career and Technical Education federal reporting, migrant course history, accelerated coursework reporting on the report card, and course data for the college and career readiness indicator within the School Performance Index. The state common

course numbers on the DOE website are categorized by subject areas and can be used to determine which courses could meet subject area requirements. More information on course codes is located at: <http://doe.sd.gov/octe/commoncourse.aspx>.

**Q3: Should districts note attainment of a student's industry-recognized credential on a transcript?**

**A3:** Yes. Districts *must* note a student's industry-recognized credential on a transcript if the student earns the Advanced Career endorsement. Districts are encouraged to note industry-recognized credentials for all students.

**Q4: How do I record advanced endorsements and industry-recognized credentials on a transcript?**

**A4:** The department is working to determine the best way to reflect the advanced endorsements and industry-recognized credentials earned by students in the Infinite Campus system and on transcripts. This will be in place before the graduation requirements are required in Fall 2020. When systems have been updated, districts will receive information and training on how to enter the information into the system.

**MISCELLANEOUS**

**Q1: How might the new graduation requirements impact student performance on the current state summative assessments?**

**A1:** The current state assessment remains the same and covers the scope of the state content standards. Districts will want to consider this as they counsel students regarding course selection. The driving factor in course selection should be the individual student's academic and career goals.